

## **Faithkeepers – A documentary for your congregation on religious persecution in the Middle East**

By Charles Stevenson

I was both surprised and delighted when I learned the Lappin Foundation, a Jewish philanthropic organization on Boston's north shore, was sponsoring a showing of the new film Faithkeepers at a local synagogue, Temple Ner Tamid. The hour-long film provides an effective and moving expose of current religious persecution in the Middle East. I was surprised that an educational foundation took on this challenge because there has been so little coverage of the persecution in the legacy media, with the resulting low public awareness of the issue. I was delighted because the free showing of this fine documentary will certainly raise the awareness and create discussion of this problem in our local community. I heartily commend the Lappin foundation and Temple Ner Tamid for their efforts.

I found everything about the film to be well done, from the writing to the production quality. It follows a traditional documentary format, interspersing recognized experts explaining the larger context with individuals describing their own person experiences.

Two of the experts featured in the film include former congressman Frank Wolf and author Raymond Ibrahim. Congressman Frank Wolf served seventeen terms in the house, where he was known as the "conscience" of the House of Representatives. He left Congress in 2015 to focus exclusively on human rights and religious freedom. He was one of the first to warn about the worsening plight of religious minorities, most notably Christian communities, in the Middle East.

Raymond Ibrahim is fluent in Arabic because he is the son of Coptic Christians. The Copts are an ancient group of Christians that survive to this day despite the Muslim conquest of Egypt 1300 years ago. Mr. Ibrahim completed a master's degree under the classicist Victor Davis Hanson. He now writes extensively on Christian persecution in the Middle East for publications ranging from National Review to the LA Times. He has published two books on al Qaeda and Christian persecution. I find his writing and speaking to well informed and completely honest, and, most importantly, to be original and insightful.

The film includes multiple refugees telling their stories in their native language, with an English translation displayed on the bottom of the screen. While this may sound dry or difficult to follow, in this situation I found it compelling because I felt that I was hearing the authentic voices of men, women, and even children as young as six. When the refugees are speaking, the screen displays simple sketches of the scenes that they are describing, all tastefully done but with a real emotional power.

One of the refugees is the Rev. Majed El Shafie, and Egyptian Muslim who converted to Christianity, resulting in imprisonment and a death sentence. He escaped on a personal watercraft (a "Jet-Ski") to Israel, where he was imprisoned again, and then he finally made it to Canada. His story is certainly worth knowing.

I must caution that it is a film for adults only, because the refugees do report horrific crimes. The reports and sketches are tactfully done, but nonetheless, they do recount atrocities. There film is without any depiction of violence, but violent crimes are named.

The film describes the persecution of religious minorities, currently and over the last hundred years. The primary emphasis is on Christians and Yazidis, but the suffering of Jewish and even Muslim communities is also described. It also tries to place current events in an historical context.

The film successfully resists all temptations to offer a partisan political commentary on contemporary events. It describes the suffering of religious minorities, nothing more, nothing less. I found it to be a moving documentary.

Showings of the film are being sponsored around the country by churches, synagogues, and community organizations. To learn more, find a site, or view a trailer, visit the site <http://faithkeepers.clarionproject.org>.